

Norfolk County Correctional Center Finds Home on Highway Median

**by Peter Perroncello,
Deputy Superintendent of Jail
Operations, Norfolk County
Sheriffs Office and
Correctional Center, Dedham,
Massachusetts**

The Norfolk County Sheriff's Office and Correctional Center is the only jail in the United States located on the median of an interstate highway. Unlikely as it seems, the site was the best one available. As the highway crossed the Charles River, the southbound lanes cut through a granite ridge, and the northbound lanes diverged, avoiding the ridge entirely. What remained was a nearly 700-foot median strip between lanes.

Federal Highway Administration's Concerns

Because of the jail's proposed location, however, the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) entered the picture, concerned over the issue of 'joint use of airspace' as well as the effect of a correctional facility on the site. The FHA wanted to ensure that motorists would not be distracted by high lighting levels surrounding the facility. In addition, the FHA recommended that any structures erected should be compatible with existing buildings along the highway.

The jail's exterior was designed to address FHA concerns about aesthetics and motorist safety. The result is a combination of precast and reinforced concrete that resembles neighboring corporate façades.

Strategic landscaping virtually conceals

the jail's exterior from view, and carefully planned lighting ensures minimal distraction to motorists. Extensive planting along the sides of the site facing the highway obscures the facility from motorists traveling north and south along the interstate highway.

Facility Design

In its natural state, the site was saddlebacked; none of it was flat. Construction required the excavation of 250,000 cubic yards of New England grey granite. It was also necessary to connect an access road to an existing street that runs under the highway.

The site provided other challenges as well. As utilities are not normally provided in the middle of interstate highways, water lines were brought in from a considerable distance. The sanitary sewer paralleled a new natural gas connection.

Within the confines of the narrow site, a long rectangular scheme running north to south was necessary. A large single-story central unit contains all administrative and

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support services. The south zone holds pretrial and special management inmates; the north zone accommodates pretrial modules. A separate, two-story minimum security pre-release facility is on the site, as well as a vehicle maintenance garage. Buildings total 144,000 gross square feet, covering 8.2 acres. The total site is approximately twelve acres.

The new 332-bed correctional center has 270 beds for pretrial and sentenced inmates in eight housing modules; another sixty-two beds are located in the minimum security center adjacent to the main facility but outside the secure perimeter.

Inmate Supervision

The facility will use two approaches to direct supervision:

- The south zone, housing pretrial and special management inmates,

will emphasize the passive elements of direct supervision. Activities will be restricted to the four housing modules.

- The north zone will have a more active environment. Inmates will be allowed out of the housing modules to eat in a common dining area, attend religious services, and participate in a variety of educational and other programs

Unit management will be used to direct activities in the eight housing modules. Unit staff will be responsible for all decisions affecting the

as a result of both groups' willingness to compromise. The design represents a unique resolution to many problems.

The Norfolk County Sheriff's Office and Correctional Center opens in mid-October, 1992, well under budget and five months ahead of schedule.

For additional information, contact Peter Perroncello, Norfolk County Sheriff's Office and Correctional Center, Dedham, Massachusetts, 02026; (617) 329-3705. ■

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operations of each module. A case-worker and a correction officer will work in tandem to improve interpersonal communication within each module.

Cooperation Among Agencies and Other Groups

Facility siting issues often generate extensive controversy. Working with this site—which might have seemed impossible—has involved the strong and continued cooperation of many groups, including the community, the sheriff's office, and the architects. Norfolk County has also achieved a landmark precedent with the Federal Highway Administration